

## AUSTRALIA AND THE REPUBLIC OF KOREA

Address by Senator Gareth Evans, Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade, to the Australia-Korea Forum dinner, Canberra, 20 November 1989.

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A few years ago, a Forum on Australia and Korea would have been dominated by economic and trade issues, because the links between us - some shared wartime experiences apart - were seen essentially as ties of commerce. And your host at dinner would have had to build a speech around the themes of beef, steel, clothing and footwear - not the most scintillating ingredients!

Today, the canvas is more varied. Trade issues remain central, as you would expect in an environment where Korea is set to become Australia's third largest export destination, with Australia's exports to Korea growing over the last five years at an average of 17 per cent per annum, and Korean exports to Australia growing by around 29 percent per annum.

But trade is no longer the only important element in the Australia-Korea relationship. As this Forum's agenda suggests - ranging as it does over political and strategic issues, industrial relations, education, science and technology, the environment and culture - we are in the process of forging a more complex, and generally a more substantial relationship.

Our traditional trade dialogue is itself becoming more sophisticated and wide ranging, focussing strongly on international and regional issues - with all the complex politics and diplomacy that goes with them - as well as the familiar narrowly-defined bilateral ones.

The APEC process, conceived in Seoul in January and born in Canberra just two weeks ago, is the clearest and most current example of how our bilateral economic relationship is now working. The cooperation between the Australian and Korean delegations both in the lead-up to and at the Canberra meeting was outstanding, reflecting the very similar views we both hold about the potential benefits of greater regional economic cooperation, and the pivotal role that an open and non-discriminatory trading system has for our economic future.

The APEC meeting also opened up a further area of cooperation between Australia and Korea in its decision to institute consultations among APEC participants - at both the ministerial and officials levels - on ways in which the momentum of the Uruguay Round negotiations can be maintained during the Round's crucial final year in 1990, as it must be sustained if we are to achieve a genuinely fair and open multilateral trading environment.

The economic map of the world we have been working with in pursuing regional and global trade liberalisation and economic cooperation has been a map very much governed by the political divisions of the Cold War. But as the ideological ice floes of that War break up all around us (not so much, as someone recently said, because either side won the Cold War as because the Soviets found they couldn't afford to prolong it!), that economic map looks as though it may need some substantial redrawing. The old distinction between market economies and command economies is fading fast as more and more new-generation leaders realise the intellectual bankruptcy of their communist ideological inheritance, and as that happens dramatic new opportunities are opening up for trade and economic dialogue.

These developments give us all much to talk about, not just in the context of economic opportunities, but in political and geo-strategic terms. Certainly Australia has a particular interest in consulting with Korea about the changing strategic environment in the North Pacific, where developments have lagged significantly behind those to which we are becoming accustomed in Eastern Europe.

Australia's security interest in the North Pacific is not, of course, as direct as that of Korea. But the political and strategic stability of the North Pacific is important to the substantial economic interests that Australia has in that region. And in these days of growing interdependence and fluidity the strategic fault lines in the North Pacific could have a direct impact on the security of South East Asia and therefore on the security of Australia itself. Serious frictions in North Asia have the potential to ignite global conflict, especially given the nuclear dimensions of the region.

The region's potential instability is highlighted by the situation on the Korean Peninsula itself which, as our Korean guests will be all too acutely aware, has for forty years been the eastern fulcrum of the global East-West conflict. Additional elements of uncertainty include the current situation in China, the position of Hong Kong and Taiwan, territorial disputes in the South China Sea, possible changes in Japan's domestic politics and in US-Japan relations, and the direction in which Japan-Soviet relations might develop. For all these reasons - quite apart from the interests of the Korean people themselves who are as weary of violence and tension as anyone else - it is crucial that conflict does not break out in the North Pacific, and that countries with an interest in North Pacific security explore balanced and realistic opportunities to reduce tensions in the region.

In terms of the pace of change, the situation on the Korean Peninsula and elsewhere in the North Pacific cannot match the drama or stirring imagery of a crumbling Berlin Wall or a Solidarity led government in Poland. But there have nevertheless been some positive developments. The Soviet Union has recently indicated that it will not oppose, and may even support, the Republic of Korea's membership of the United Nations. Hungary has established full diplomatic relations with Seoul and some other East European states are

likely to follow. Trade between the ROK and Socialist bloc countries is expanding rapidly. All these developments have strengthened the ROK's international standing and boosted its capacity to make a contribution to regional issues going well beyond the Korean Peninsula.

This increased self-confidence is also reflected in the ROK's "nordpolitik" which represents an imaginative effort - and one which Australia welcomes - to open up a genuine dialogue with the Democratic Peoples Republic of Korea (DPRK). For our own part, we have indicated to the DPRK that we are prepared to continue the dialogue initiated by it late last year on the possible resumption of full diplomatic relations which were interrupted in 1975 when the DPRK abruptly withdrew its embassy from Canberra and expelled our embassy from Pyongyang.

Indeed, so abrupt was the North Korean withdrawal that it obviously considerably distracted its embassy staff at the time. To the extent that in the mad rush to escape Canberra one unfortunate and flustered official of the North Korean embassy crashed his car soon after leaving the embassy compound. Distraught, he rushed into the nearest house to call for assistance - only to find that his would be good Samaritan was the South Korean ambassador. In such little ways do we seek to play a bridging role!

We do not think it appropriate, at this stage, to resume full diplomatic relations with North Korea. Our attitude to improved relations will depend on developments in ROK/DPRK relations, the DPRK's international behaviour, and on our level of confidence that there is in fact a basis for a constructive relationship. That case very much remains to be proved, not least in the light of the disturbing suggestion that the DPRK may be reviewing its policy towards the acquisition of nuclear weapons, a proliferation prospect against which Australia among others has long campaigned.

Since this speech is itself in danger of proliferating, let me move on - finally - to some remarks about the continuing effort Australia and Korea - and Australians and Koreans - need to make to know more about each other. Notwithstanding our shared war-time experiences and the substantial economic links between us, we are not nations or societies which know a great deal about the other.

Australians' knowledge of Korea is undoubtedly limited, although the rapidly growing penetration of the Australian market by highly regarded consumer goods, and the Seoul Olympics, were remarkably successful in opening eyes, here as elsewhere, as to the extent of the country's development and the extent to which it is becoming a sophisticated modern nation.

We know a few more specific things about Koreans' perception of Australia as a result of a recent survey conducted for the Garnaut Report on North East Asia to be released later

this week. The news is not all that encouraging from an Australian perspective. Only just over one third considered Australia "an advanced" country, while a similar proportion rated it "semi-advanced", the rest being evenly divided between those who categorised Australia as a "developing" country and those who could not tell.

When the question turned to a more open-ended enquiry about the "kind of things" they knew, or "sort of image" they had of Australia, Korean respondents were much more likely to refer to various physical attributes of the country than to anything which might denote an advanced state of civilisation, or a high standard of living. Of the 62 percent of the sample who volunteered any sort of image of Australia, 20 percent mentioned the land itself, the climate or the sea; 13 percent referred to Australia's "nature abounding" or to sheep, koalas, kangaroos and other animals, and 12 percent mentioned farming, agriculture or minerals. The closest thing there was to a comment on the state of Australian civilisation or its standard of living was the reference to Australia's being an "easy/ comfortable" place to live - mentioned by 18 percent.

In its dealings with the world, Korea has understandably tended to look mainly east. When it has looked south, it has been more to South East Asia than to Australia and the South Pacific. Similarly, Australia's contacts with North East Asia - with the exception of commercial ties - has traditionally tended to focus more on other nations. In these days of growing interdependence, and as fellow members of the Asia Pacific region, we can no longer afford to remain relative strangers to one another.

It is an endeavour in which governments can and must participate, and the Hawke Government is committed to playing an active role in helping to break down the cultural and other barriers that stand in the way of a multi-faceted relationship. We are particularly addressing, in this connection the deficiency evident in the teaching in Australia at senior level of Korean language, history, politics and culture.

As we work to broaden the base of our bilateral dialogue, we need always to bear in mind that this is not a process which can be left just - or even mainly - to governments. The Prime Minister referred this morning to the impressive people-to-people links which are growing up between Australia and Korea. These will over time lend a certain depth and ease to the relationship which no amount of governmental activity can hope to achieve.

Similarly, the private sectors in each country have an important role to play. Not just in encouraging more trade and investment - important though that is - but also in helping each community to understand the other. Some important steps in this direction have already been taken by the private sector. I have in mind, in particular, the very useful involvement which the private sector has had in providing resources for the Australia-Korea cultural relations program.

I do not want to be seen as advocating the privatisation of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade - tempting though the thought may be at times. But I do welcome this sort of imaginative approach which indicates that the private sector appreciates the importance of Australian business - and Australia society more generally - becoming more Asia literate - to use the graphic, if somewhat inelegant, term currently in vogue.

The Australia-Korea Forum was established to broaden and deepen the dialogue between our two communities at all levels. Breaking down stereotypes and refocusing interests is not done easily or quickly. But this Forum and the many other contacts we have in place are important steps along the way.

But for the process of getting to know each other better is to work effectively, it requires a cooperative approach among the government, the private sector, academia and other sections of the community. It is this approach that the Australia-Korea Forum takes and this is why the Australian government values your efforts so highly.

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